



# HILL AEROSPACE MUSEUM

**HILL AIR FORCE BASE, UTAH**

## A Short Primer on Military Aircraft Designations

All American military aircraft are given a multi-part designation comprised of alphabetic characters and numbers. For Air Force aircraft, a letter or combination of letters denotes the type of aircraft and its role. This is followed by a number that tells the type sequence of the aircraft. This number is usually followed by one or more letters that describe the exact version and other characters that describe the aircraft's manufacturing block and manufacturer code. In addition, most Air Force aircraft are also assigned an official name to go along with their designation.

Here is a listing of the letters used to describe the various common types of American military aircraft and their roles:

<b>A</b>	Attack/Tactical Support	Designed to seek out and destroy specific enemy targets using a variety of weapons. Also provides close air support of ground troops.
<b>B</b>	Bomber	Designed to carry heavy loads of bombs, torpedoes, or missiles great distances.
<b>C</b>	Transport	Designed to carry heavy cargo, passengers, and/or medical patients.
<b>D</b>	Drone/Drone Director	Unmanned aircraft (either remotely or automatically controlled) or the manned aircraft that controls this type of unmanned vehicle.
<b>E</b>	Electronics	Identifies aircraft that have been specially modified to perform electronic, command and control, or communications missions.
<b>F</b>	Fighter	Designed to intercept and destroy enemy aircraft or missiles. During World War II "F" denoted

		photo-recon aircraft.
<b>H</b>	Helicopter	Denotes rotary wing aircraft, rather than fixed wing. Prefix also signifies "search and rescue" aircraft.
<b>K</b>	Tanker	Denotes an aircraft designed to transfer fuel to other aircraft in flight.
<b>L</b>	Liaison	Identifies aircraft used for artillery spotting, transporting commanders and messengers, battlefield reconnaissance, and similar duties.
<b>M</b>	Multi-mission	Identifies aircraft specially configured to support special operations.
<b>O</b>	Observation	Low-flying, slower aircraft designed to work closely with ground forces.
<b>P</b>	Patrol/Pursuit	Denoted "pursuit" aircraft (fighters) during World War II. Today, it denotes "patrol" or observation aircraft.
<b>Q</b>	Radio Controlled Drone	Unmanned aircraft, either remotely or automatically controlled.
<b>R</b>	Reconnaissance	Designed or modified for reconnaissance missions.
<b>SR</b>	Strategic Reconnaissance	Designed for strategic reconnaissance missions.
<b>T</b>	Trainer	Used to train pilots to fly or transition between types of aircraft. (In the past, "AT" meant "advanced trainer" and "PT" meant "primary trainer.")
<b>TR</b>	Tactical Reconnaissance	Designed or modified for tactical recon missions.
<b>U</b>	Utility	Aircraft used to carry small amounts of cargo, supplies, documents, or personnel from base to base.
<b>V</b>	Staff Transport	Prefix denotes aircraft modified for transporting staff personnel. Also, used in denoting short-takeoff or vertical-takeoff fixed-wing aircraft.

<b>X</b>	Experimental	Used for special research or flight test aircraft.
<b>Y</b>	Service Test	Denotes the evaluation or flight test variant of a pre-production aircraft.